

Congressman Jesse Jackson, Jr., today said, "I want to congratulate President George W. Bush for signing the bipartisan Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks and Coretta Scott King Voting Rights Reauthorization and Amendments Act of 2006. Originally signed by President Johnson on August 6, 1965, it was renewed and expanded in 1970, 1975 and 1982 for 25-years (2007). Today's signing extends the temporary sections of the law for another 25 years, until 2032. The historic 1965 Voting Rights Act was the implementing legislation for the 1870 ratified 15th Amendment - 95 years later - which outlawed discrimination in voting on the basis of race. It opened the voting booth to millions of Americans formerly excluded by racially discriminatory voting practices.

"Now that the President has signed the Voting Rights Act Extension, the issue is whether Bush's Justice Department will *enforce* the law. According to the Center for American Progress, 'Since 2002, the Bush administration has quietly filled the ranks of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division - the nation's top enforcer of anti-discrimination laws - with lawyers who have strong conservative credentials but little experience in civil rights. According to William Yeomans, a 24-year division veteran who retired last year, morale among career attorneys has plummeted, the division's productivity has suffered and the pace of civil rights enforcement has slowed. Although a committee of career veterans had made hiring decisions for decades, former Attorney General John Ashcroft changed the rules in 2003 to minimize input from staff, allowing the process to be handled completely by political appointees.'

"The second issue is whether the conservatives Bush has appointed to the federal courts will *interpret* it in a way that allows precedent regarding the Voting Rights Act to stand.

"Finally, the American people must be educated to know that they still don't have an individual citizenship right to vote in the Constitution. Our voting system is based on the 10th Amendment - states' rights - which is why the 7,800 voting jurisdictions in the United States are all separate and unequal and subject to state laws and local control. That's why I have offered H.J. Res. 28, which gives the American people the 'right to vote' and Congress the power to create a unified voting system across America.

"We must remain eternally vigilant when it comes to democracy and its crown jewel, the vote," Jackson concluded.